

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 MC-01 NIC-01 /061 W

----- 004542

R 031055Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY SANAA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4953

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

S E C R E T SANAA 0282

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MASS, YE, SA

SUBJECT: FONMIN ASNAG ON INTERNAL YEMEN SITUATION

1. SUMMARY: ON FEB 2 NEWLY APPOINTED FONMIN ABDULLAH ASNAG DESCRIBED CURRENT INTERNAL SITUATION IN YEMEN AS GOOD WITH LTC IBRAHIM HAMDI IN CONTROL. ASNAG INDICATED THAT OVER COMING MONTHS MODERATES WISH TO MOVE AGAINST EXTREMISTS OF BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT. ASNAG EXPRESSED HOPE SAUDIS WILL SUPPORT HAMDI TO PREVENT POLARIZATION IN COUNTRY WHICH WOULD ONLY BENEFIT EXTREMISTS SUPPORTED BY PDRY AND IRAQ. SPECIFICALLY ASNAG ASKED THAT SAUDIS PROVIDE YEMEN ARMY WITH WEAPONS ALREADY PROMISED IN ORDER TO ENABLE HIM MOVE AGAINST POTENTIAL SOURCES OF TROUBLE FROM THE LUHUM CLAN. I RECOMMEND THAT WE SHOULD ADVISE SAUDIS TO SUPPORT HAMDI AS THE BEST MAN AT THIS JUNCTURE TO KEEP YEMEN ON AN EVEN KEEL. END SUMMARY

2. DURING FEB 2 COURTESY CALL, FONMIN ASNAG INFORMED ME THAT CURRENT INTERNAL SITUATION IN YEMEN IS GOOD WITH LTC HAMDI CLEARLY IN CONTROL. ASNAG, HOWEVER, EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT POTENTIAL FOR TROUBLE-MAKING WHICH SHEIKH SINAN ABU LUHUM STILL ENJOYS IN COOPERATION WITH LEFTIST ELEMENTS SUPPORTED BY PDRY AND IRAQ. ASNAG STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN IN JIDDA WEEK BEFORE AND BRIEFED PRINCE SULTAN ALONG THESE LINES, WHILE ENCOURAGING LATTER TO GIVE FULL SUPPORT TO HAMDI.

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ASNAG CONTINUED THAT SULTAN APPEARED TO UNDERSTAND NEED FOR

HAMDY AND MODERATES TO REMAIN IN CONTROL LEST INTERNAL SITUATION IN YEMEN POLARIZE. ASNAG NOTED WRONGLY THAT SAUDIS "DO NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTAND YEMENIS", DESPITE SAUDI OFT-EXPRESSED INTENTION TO ALLOW YEMENIS TO SETTLE THEIR INTERNAL AFFAIRS IN THEIR OWN WAY.

3. ASNAG CONTINUED THAT THERE ARE THREE STEPS WHICH MUST BE TAKEN OVER COMING MONTHS TO ENABLE MODERATES TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF INTERNAL SITUATION:

A) AS PROMISED BY SAUDIS, THE REMOVAL OF GENERAL AMRI FROM THE SCENE FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST SO THAT HE DOES NOT BECOME RALLYING POINT FOR HARD-LINE CONSERVATIVES.

B) IN ORDER TO FORESTALL POSSIBLE COLLUSION BETWEEN SHAIKH ABDULLAH AL-AHMAR AND SINAN ABU LUHUM, ASSURANCES TO AHMAR THAT HAMDY DOES NOT PLAN TO MOVE AGAINST HIM AND HIS TRIBESMEN NOW THAT HAMDY ENJOYS ALMOST FULL SUPPORT OF ARMY.

C) EARLY DELIVERY BY SAUDIS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO YEMENI ARMY IN ORDER THAT HAMDY MAY EQUIP SEVERAL NEW UNITS WHICH IN TURN WILL ENABLE HAMDY TO MAKE FINAL MOVES AGAINST ALI ABU LUHUM AND MOHAMMAD ABU LUHUM, COMMANDERS OF THE RESERVE FORCES AND THE 6TH ARMORED BRIGADE RESPECTIVELY, WHO ARE PRESENTLY ONLY SOURCE OF POTENTIAL SUPPORT FOR SHAIKH SINAN, THEIR BROTHER.

4. ASNAG WENT ON THAT MY MOVING SLOWLY AND CAUTIOUSLY, THE MODERATES WANT TO REMOVE AL-AYNI FROM POLITICAL SCENE FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY WISH TO CONSOLIDATE THE POSITION OF THOSE YEMENI MODERATES AND MODERNISTS WHO ARE TRULY WORKING FOR YEMEN'S NATIONAL INTERESTS. THE SAUDIS MUST UNDERSTAND THIS AND NOT PUSH FOR A MORE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT, LEST THIS BACK FIRE ON THEM IN YEMEN.

ASNAG DESCRIBED ABD AL-AZIZ ABD AL-GHANI AS THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB OF PRIME MINISTER AT THE PRESENT TIME BECAUSE AS A MODERATE AND A MODERNIST HE CANNOT BE ACCUSED BY THE ADHERENTS OF AL-AYNI AS BEING A TOOL OF THE RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES AND BY EXTENSION OF THE SAUDIS. ASNAG ADDED THAT IN A FEW MONTHS ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD AND AT THAT TIME PERHAPS SOME OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE SAUDIS MIGHT ALSO BE INCLUDED IN THE GOVERNMENT; HAMDY, HOWEVER MUST MOVE SLOWLY IN ORDER TO HEAD OFF CHARGES THAT THE SAUDIS ARE MANIPULATING HIM.

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5. ASNAG STATED THAT PRINCE SULTAN HAS PROMISED EARLY DELIVERY OF EQUIPMENT FOR THE YEMEN ARMY BUT HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT US WILL ALSO DISCREETLY ADVISE SAUDIS THAT THIS IN THEIR INTEREST TO DO. I INFORMED ASNAG THAT FIFER REPORT NOW BEING REVIEWED BY PENTAGON AND THAT NEXT STEP WAS FOR SAUDIS TO PROVIDE USG WITH RESULTS OF THEIR RECENT STUDY SO THAT FIFER REPORT

AND SAUDI REPORT MIGHT BE COORDINATED. I ADVISED ASNAG TO PASS THIS WORD TO HAMDI AND SUGGEST THAT YAR TOO MAKE FURTHER EFFORT PRESS SAUDIS. I PROMISED WE SHOULD DO LIKEWISE.

6. COMMENT: ASNAG WAS AS FRIENDLY AND OPEN AS I HAD BEEN LED TO BELIEVE. HE PROMISED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH ME AND TO KEEP ME INFORMED OF ALL CURRENT EVENTS. WHILE APPEARING RELAXED AND CONFIDENT, HE DID STRIKE ME AS BEING GENUINELY CONCERNED THAT AMDI'S ABILITY OVER THE NEXT 3 TO 6 MONTHS TO MOVE AGAINST "EXTREMISTS" MIGHT BE ERODED IF SAUDIS DO NOT RALLY AROUND. NONETHELESS, IT WAS OBVIOUS TO ME, HE CLEARLY BELIEVES HAMDI IS THE MAN FOR YEMEN AT THE PRESENT TIME AND HOPES THAT WE AND THE SAUDIS WILL SUPPORT HIM FULLY. I RECOMMEND THAT AMBASSADOR AKINS PASS THE WORD TO THE SAUDIS OF THE NEED TO SUPPORT HAMDI BY MOVING QUICKLY ON BOTH THEIR DIRECT ARMS SHIPMENTS AS WELL AS ON THE RECENT SAUDI MILITARY REPORT.
SCOTES

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SANAA00282
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750038-0728
From: SANAA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750277/aaaacrhh.tel
Line Count: 133
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 AUG 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <22 DEC 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FONMIN ASNAG ON INTERNAL YEMEN SITUATION
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MASS, YE, (ASNAG, ABDULLAH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006